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SUBJECT: Al Quds University Freezes Official Cooperation with
Israeli Institutions

REF: Jerusalem 200

¶1. (SBU) Summary: In response to the IDF operations in Gaza, the University Council of Al Quds University voted to put a moratorium on official cooperation with Israeli academic institutions. The decision was endorsed by the university President, Dr. Sari Nusseibeh, generally a strong advocate of co-existence projects. Nusseibeh told the Consul General February 3 that he views the boycott as a way of attracting greater international attention and pressure to achieve a two-state solution. The decision by Al Quds, the only Palestinian university to have any official relations with Israeli universities, will end significant interactions between Palestinian and Israeli students and academics. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) The University Council of Al Quds University decided on February 1 to put an end to all official cooperation and partnerships with Israeli academic institutions. According to Dr. Hasan Dweik, Executive Assistant to the President, this decision does not suspend any ongoing programs with Israeli partners, but prohibits any new contracts, agreements, or cooperation with the Israeli partners. The Palestinian academic community was surprised by the decision, which came at the specific recommendation of the university's president, Sari Nusseibeh, a long-time advocate of normalization programs.

¶3. (SBU) In an official statement, the Board said the moratorium is "in response to the prior Israeli onslaught [on Gaza]; the acts and policies of Israeli governments over the past ten years, including settlement construction in East Jerusalem; the tightening of the siege on the occupied territories; and thwarting [by Israel of] any negotiated peace process that will lead to an independent Palestinian state living in peace alongside Israel." The statement went on to say that "If the two-state solution is as far away today as it was ten years ago, there is no justification for continued academic cooperation..."

¶4. (SBU) The moratorium on cooperation with Israeli institutions is a temporary six-month measure, according to Assistant Professor Musa Bajali, an advisor to Nusseibeh. Currently, 42 professors at Al Quds are engaged in academic and research projects with Israeli academic institutions. Nusseibeh said these professors can choose to continue their cooperative programs, but only as individuals and not under the auspices of Al Quds University. No official agreements may be signed by any academic department with an Israeli partner in the name of Al-Quds University. Al Quds professors cannot publicly advertise any individual partnerships that may continue.

¶5. (SBU) Nusseibeh told the Consul General February 3 that he views the boycott as a way to attract greater international attention to Palestinian grievances and to generate increased pressure for a two-state solution to the conflict. He said the university will reevaluate the boycott in six months to see if it is achieving its objective. He called the election of President Obama a window of opportunity and said explicitly that Al Quds will not boycott the

U.S. or USG programs. End Note.]

¶6. (U) The Al Quds statement, which was featured on the university's website immediately after the Board meeting, received widespread and prominent media coverage and the full text of the University Council decision was subsequently printed in the local dailies.

¶7. (SBU) COMMENT: Al Quds University has been the only Palestinian university to have any official relations with Israeli academic institutions. The university was frequently criticized for its very public support for normalization programs. By putting a stop to such cooperation, Al Quds is ending significant interactions between Palestinian and Israeli students and academics. End Comment.

WALLES